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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: DOD ACTING A/S MARY BETH LONG REVIEWS REGIONAL  
ISSUES WITH OMANI MFA UNDER SECRETARY

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a March 20 meeting with Acting DoD A/S Mary Beth Long, Omani MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi emphasized the need to find a "political solution" to the situation in Iraq, noting that violence there was fueling the spread of extremist ideology. He urged the U.S. to look at Iraq as one piece in a broader regional mosaic, and argued that efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were "central" to helping solve other problems in the region. On Iran, Sayyid Badr acknowledged U.S. concerns and frustrations, but advocated dialogue "without preconditions" to help restore trust between Tehran and the West and to resolve the Iranian nuclear file. End Summary.

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VIOLENCE IN IRAQ FUELS EXTREMISM  
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¶2. (C) Acting DoD Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs Mary Beth Long, accompanied by the Ambassador and U.S. military officials attending the U.S.-Oman Joint Military Commission (JMC), met on March 20 with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi. Ministry of Defense Under Secretary Mohammad al-Rasby also participated in the meeting. Focusing first on Iraq, Sayyid Badr stated that while sectarian violence had not yet spilled outside of Iraq's borders, "destructive ideology" was spreading from Iraq through the region. This ideology not only inflamed tensions between Sunnis and Shi'a, but also promoted conflict between Islamic and Western cultures. Sayyid Badr claimed that the violence in Iraq helped create "easy ground" for extremists to propagate their message of hate. Consequently, he asserted, finding a solution to the conflict in Iraq was imperative to preserving regional stability and combating terrorism.

¶3. (C) Commenting that casting blame for past mistakes in Iraq was "useless," Sayyid Badr argued that military force alone could not end the insurgency. While restoring security to Iraq was important, only a "political solution" that would win the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people could end the violence. Use of the media to send positive messages could help in this regard, Sayyid Badr continued, but it was difficult for governments to influence public opinion when "so much of what people think" came from negative images and stories on their TV screens. Sayyid Badr added that the U.S. needed to look at Iraq, as well as Lebanon and Iran, as "pieces in a broader regional puzzle." Central to resolving many current problems in the region, he claimed, was progress on -- and ultimately a solution to -- the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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NEW APPROACH NEEDED ON REGIONAL ISSUES

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¶4. (C) Arguing that traditional "carrot and stick" approaches were often ineffective in ending conflicts, Sayyid Badr said that "creative thinking" was needed to address regional issues. Insistence in Washington on pursuing sanctions and imposing preconditions on talks reinforced public perceptions that the U.S. did not really listen to Arab concerns, but simply wanted to impose its will and advance Israeli interests. Sayyid Badr remarked that the negative image of the U.S. in the region was "extremely unfortunate" given that there is "so much that is good" about the U.S., and he pledged his support to help Washington improve its standing. Asked what Arab countries could do to provide economic opportunities for Palestinians, Sayyid Badr responded that the Palestinian people first and foremost wanted freedom, including "freedom from humiliation and repression," and that jobs were seen as a secondary concern.

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TALKING TO TEHRAN  
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¶5. (C) Turning to Iran, Sayyid Badr noted that his views were shaped by the fact that he was "an Omani whose close neighbor is Iran." If the international community truly hoped to solve its differences with Tehran, then it needed to seriously look at Iranian concerns - which necessarily shaped Iran's behavior - and try to find a way to address them. He stated that it was also important for both the P5 plus one and Iran to work to overcome the distinct lack of trust between them, as this was at the "heart" of the nuclear issue. Iran, he explained, needed to provide guarantees that its nuclear program is and would remain peaceful in nature,

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while the West needed to convince Tehran that it harbored no plans for a military conflict or regime change. As an attack on Iran would be "disastrous" for the region, Sayyid Badr urged the U.S. to "leave no stone unturned" in pursuing diplomacy and dialogue with Tehran.

¶6. (S) Acting A/S Long assured Sayyid Badr that the U.S. had no interest in a confrontation with Iran and was committed to working with the UN and the Europeans to engage Tehran. Direct U.S. dialogue with the Iranians was, however, very problematic as Tehran was directly involved in assisting efforts to kill U.S. troops in Iraq. Iran's previous rejection of the P5 plus one incentive package, she commented, further demonstrated that "something more" (i.e. sanctions) was needed in dealing with Iran. Sayyid Badr replied that he did not believe that further sanctions on Iran would help the situation and could even motivate Iranian officials to speed up enrichment plans. It was better for the U.S. and its allies to reach an agreement with Tehran to tightly monitor and control Iran's nuclear activities than to have no deal at all, he added. While he understood legitimate U.S. concerns and frustrations related to Iran, he advised Washington to "bite the bullet" and hold talks with Iran, either directly or in a multi-national context, without imposing any preconditions.  
GRAPPO